

**Testimony of Francine Coss
Superintendent of Schools, Thomaston, Connecticut**

***H.B. No. 7027 AN ACT CONCERNING THE STATE BUDGET FOR THE BIENNIUM
ENDING JUNE THIRTIETH 2019, AND MAKING APPROPRIATIONS THEREFOR.**

*February 23 2017 Appropriations Subcommittee on Health Public Hearing
Department of Mental Health & Addiction Services, Regional Action Council Funding*

Senator Osten, Senator Formica, Representative Walker, Senator Gerratana, Senator Markley, Representative Dillon and members of the Appropriations Subcommittee,

My name is Francine Coss and I am the Superintendent of Schools in Thomaston. As you will read, my testimony offers **strong opposition to the proposed cut in funding to Regional Action Councils** as these cuts will decimate the current, community-based prevention network structure.

Currently and as in previous years, the portion of the proposed State budget for the Department of Mental Health and Addition Services (DMHAS) includes the following:

“Consolidate Substance Abuse and Mental Health Advocacy Organizations” for a savings of \$1.205 million. See page B-56 in the agency budget sheet document.

This budget proposal affects all thirteen Regional Action Councils in Connecticut. The total funding proposed is \$300,000 distributing approximately \$16,600 per Regional Action Council.

This proposed budget reduction does not support consolidation, it imposes complete elimination of Regional Action Councils in Connecticut.

Regional Action Councils (RACs) were created by the Legislature in 1989 to assess community substance abuse problems; inventory resources to address substance abuse problems; identify gaps in services; identify changes to community environments that will reduce substance abuse; and design programs and develop plans to fill identified gaps in services. The thirteen Regional Action Councils bring key constituency groups together including government leaders, mental health and substance abuse treatment professionals, law enforcement, social service providers, school personnel, parents, civic groups, faith organizations, youth and others. These individuals and groups make up the RACs’ community coalitions that advocate wellness across all 169 cities and towns in Connecticut. **Because Regional Action Councils are led by community leaders and residents, their prevention strategies are tailored to meet each community’s specific needs.** The RACs’ ability to work at the grassroots level allows information regarding substance abuse and community needs to be collected and/or disseminated efficiently.¹

The members of Regional Action Councils serve as volunteers and are assisted by professional staff **who will no longer be available to the RACs if the proposed budget for DMHAS is implemented.**

¹ <https://ctprevention.org/about-cpn/what-is-a-rac/>

Regional Action Councils provide:²

- Community mobilization
- Grant collaboration
- Substance abuse awareness, education and prevention initiatives
- Media advocacy
- Program development
- Legislative advocacy
- Leverage funds for local initiatives
- Community needs assessment through surveys, data collection and trainings

DMHAS provides funding annually for core administrative support and coordination of prevention initiatives. The Regional Action Councils generate additional resources to support services needed in the subregions.³

If you do not reinstate the requisite level of funding for Regional Action Councils, the core administrative support and coordination of prevention services will cease to exist and the ability to generate additional resources to support services needed in the subregions will be an impossibility.

As of the time I write this testimony, the official website of *The Office of the Governor*⁴ displays the following statement from Governor Dannel Malloy about substance abuse:

“Connecticut is taking a stand against a nationwide prescription opioid and heroin overdose epidemic to become a leader in combating opioid and heroin use, preventing drug addiction and overdoses.”⁵

The Governor’s recommendation to reduce funding to Regional Action Councils in Connecticut is a complete opposite action to his statement about becoming a leader in combating and preventing drug addiction and overdoses. The children, parents, spouses, siblings and neighbors of those addicted to drugs need the RACs and the grassroots work that they currently do on the local level; these councils are Connecticut’s first line of defense, and perhaps the most critical structure to maintain in support of the Governor’s statement about becoming a leader in combating and preventing drug addiction and overdoses.

I urge you to reject the severe budget cuts to Regional Action Councils and to keep intact the current CT Prevention Network structure.

I also urge you to remind Governor Malloy of what he stated about Connecticut taking a stand against the opioid and heroin overdose epidemic and to become the leader he described by reinstating the requisite funding for Regional Action Councils.

² <http://www.ct.gov/dmhas/cwp/view.asp?a=2908&q=334690>

³ <http://www.ct.gov/dmhas/cwp/view.asp?a=2908&q=334690>

⁴ <http://portal.ct.gov/en/Office-of-the-Governor/Substance-Abuse>

⁵ <http://portal.ct.gov/en/Office-of-the-Governor/Substance-Abuse>

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